

REMARKS

After entering the foregoing amendments, claims 2-4, 6, 15, 16, 18-23, 25-30, 32, 44-47, 49, 51, and 57-59 are presently pending in this application. Claims 1, 5, 7-14, 17, 24, 31, 48, 50, and 52 have been cancelled in this paper, and claims 33-43 and 53-56 were cancelled in a previous paper. Pending allowance of claim 44, the applicants request reinstatement of claim 47. Claim 6 has been rewritten in independent form to include the features of its base claim without changing the scope of claim 6. Claims 2-4 have been rewritten to depend from independent claim 6. Claims 15, 16, 19, and 26 have been amended to clarify certain aspects of these claims.

In the Office Action dated December 1, 2004, claims 1-3, 8, 10-12, 14-16, 18-23, 25-30, 32, 44-46, 49, 51 and 57-59 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) over U.S. Patent No. 5,938,860 issued to Williams ("Williams"). This reference is owned by the assignee of the present application and was cited by the applicants in an Information Disclosure Statement. The applicants thank the Examiner for indicating that claim 6 presents allowable subject matter if rewritten in independent form to include all of the features of its base claim and any intervening claims. Claim 6 has been amended as such, and thus claim 6 and dependent claims 2-4 which depend from claim 6 are in condition for immediate allowance. The remainder of these remarks addresses the patentably distinguishing features of independent claims 15, 20, 26, 27, 44 and 57.

A. Response to Rejection of Independent Claims 15, 19 and 26

Claim 15 is directed toward a system for cleaning a reticle used in the photolithographic processing of microelectronic workpieces. The reticle includes a plate with a photomask and a pellicle frame around the photomask. The claimed system comprises a holder configured to carry the reticle, a lid having an interface surface configured to fit within the pellicle frame and form a barrier between the photomask and the pellicle frame, and at least one fluid dispenser configured to direct fluid onto the pellicle frame. Claim 15 requires that the rim of the cover fit within the pellicle frame such that the interface surface forms a barrier *between the photomask and the pellicle*

frame. This allows the fluid dispenser to direct a fluid onto the pellicle frame so that glue and/or other matter on the pellicle frame can be removed without affecting the photomask.

Williams discloses, at least in part, a cover that fits around the periphery of the pellicle to seal the pellicle from the external environment during a cleaning process. Referring to Figure 4 and lines 55-60 of Column 4 in Williams, the lid in Williams encases the pellicle membrane and the pellicle frame to seal the pellicle from the external environment of the cleaning system. The lid accordingly prevents cleaning fluid from contacting the pellicle membrane and the pellicle frame to avoid damage.

Claim 15 is patentable over Williams because this reference does not disclose a lid having an interface surface configured to fit within the pellicle frame to form a barrier between the photomask and the pellicle frame. Because the lid of claim 15 provides a barrier "between" the photomask and the pellicle frame such that the pellicle frame is at least partially exposed, the fluid dispenser can accordingly direct a fluid onto the pellicle frame in claim 15. In contrast to the claimed system, Williams discloses a system in which the lid encases the pellicle frame and the pellicle membrane to seal the pellicle from the environment. Therefore, Williams does not anticipate claim 15 because this reference does not disclose at least one feature of the claim.

Claim 16 is further patentable over Williams because this claim further recites a rim depending from the cover to define a recess, and this claim defines the rim as being configured to fit within the pellicle frame. Claim 16 is accordingly further patentable over Williams.

Claim 19 is another independent claim that is similar to claim 15 in that claim 19 recites a casing having a rim configured to fit within the pellicle frame. Claim 26 similarly recites a casing configured to seal against the plate within the pellicle frame. Claims 19 and 26 are accordingly patentable over Williams as explained above with respect to claim 15.

B. Response to Rejection of Independent Claim 20

Claim 20 is patentable over Williams because this reference fails to disclose a cover configured to form a fluid barrier between the photomask and the pellicle frame such that the rim of the pellicle frame remains exposed. Claim 20, more specifically, is directed toward a system for cleaning a reticle including a plate with a photomask and a pellicle frame with a rim around the photomask. The system of claim 20 includes a holder configured to carry the reticle, and a cover configured to form a barrier between the photomask and the pellicle frame *with the rim of the pellicle frame remaining exposed*. As explained above, Williams encases the pellicle frame and the pellicle membrane, and thus the cover in Williams is not configured to form a barrier that leaves the rim of the pellicle frame exposed. Claim 20, and dependent claims 22, 23, and 25 are accordingly patentable over Williams.

C. Response to Rejection of Independent Claim 27

Claim 27 is patentable over Williams because this reference fails to disclose a cover configured to form a fluid barrier around the photomask without covering the upper edge of the pellicle frame. Claim 27 is also directed toward a system for cleaning a reticle. The reticle includes a plate with a photomask and a pellicle frame with an upper edge around the photomask. The system of claim 27 comprises a holder configured to carry the reticle, a cover configured to form a fluid barrier around the photomask *without covering the upper edge of the pellicle frame*, and a securing mechanism for releasably holding the cover of the reticle. Because Williams discloses a cover that encases the pellicle frame and the pellicle membrane, the upper edge of the pellicle frame in Williams is covered. Williams accordingly does not disclose a cover that forms a fluid barrier around the photomask without covering the upper edge of the pellicle frame. Claim 27 and the corresponding dependent claims are accordingly patentable over Williams.

D. Response to Rejection of Independent Claim 44

Claim 44 is directed toward a method for cleaning a reticle in the fabrication of microelectronic devices. The method of claim 24 comprises mounting the reticle to a

holder, disposing a cover relative to the reticle to form a fluid barrier *between a photomask in the reticle and a pellicle frame around the photomask*, and dispensing a cleaning fluid onto *the pellicle frame*. Because Williams discloses encasing the pellicle frame with its cover, Williams does not disclose disposing a cover relative to the reticle to form a barrier between a photomask in the reticle and a pellicle frame around the photomask. Williams also fails to disclose dispensing a cleaning fluid onto the pellicle frame because the cover in Williams encases the pellicle frame in a matter that prevents fluid from contacting the pellicle frame. Therefore, independent claim 44 and dependent claims 45-47, 49 and 51 are patentable over Williams.

E. Response to Rejection of Independent Claim 57

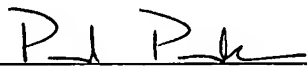
Claim 57 is patentable over Williams because this reference fails to disclose means for forming *a barrier between the photomask area and the pellicle frame*. Claim 57 is a means plus function claim directed toward a system for protecting a photomask area of a reticle. The system of claim 57 comprises means for carrying the reticle, means for forming a barrier between the photomask area and the pellicle frame of the reticle, and means for dispensing at least one fluid onto the reticle. As explained above, the cover in Williams encases the pellicle frame such that it does not form a barrier *between the photomask area and the pellicle frame*. Therefore, claims 57-59 are patentable over Williams.

F. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, the pending claims comply with 35 U.S.C. § 112 and are patentable over the applied art. The applicants accordingly request reconsideration of the application and a mailing of a Notice of Allowance. If the Examiner has any questions or believes a telephone conference would expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is encouraged to call the undersigned at (206) 359-3258.

Respectfully submitted,
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